

# 40 WEEKS EARL BLUMENAUER #36 Ensuring Patient Choices 40 IDEAS

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## Background

End of life planning and care is a daunting subject to most Americans because it is an issue that most people would rather not talk about. As a result of this silence, there is a great deal of unnecessary confusion, pain, and suffering.

It is one of the most important issues in health care reform because it can improve the quality of life, in some cases the quantity of life, and assure that people receive the type of care they want. Often, people with knowledge about their end of life options regularly choose to get less intense care and more palliative care. They are choosing comfort and consciousness with family and friends over being hooked up to machines in an ICU, struggling in their last minutes.

The default mode of treatment in end of life situations in almost every hospital will be to give the maximum, most extreme care. Without end of life planning, patients who have no hope of survival and who may be entirely unaware (like in cases of Alzheimer's or Dementia) may be subjected to resuscitation efforts that only cause pain. Patients choices about their own lives should be respected.

There is a better way.

## Solution

Congressman Blumenauer has introduced legislation to personalize end of life care, to strengthen patient-centered decision-making, and to ensure that doctors and hospitals know and understand patient choices. It would ensure doctors worked with patients to help them understand what their choices are and help them determine what works best for them and their

families.

90% of Americans surveyed agree that this is the right approach.

Studies have shown that managing care, dealing with hospice, and spending final hours surrounded by loved ones, family, and friends can actually in some cases lead to more time – time in which people can find comfort.

Americans deserve a Congress that will have a thoughtful, rational conversation about this policy without resorting to fear mongering or falsities like “death panels.” Congress should modernize Medicare to give people the care they want, ensure people have a mechanism to find out their choices, and to make sure those choices are respected. If this happens, the costs of health care will go down even as satisfaction and quality goes up.

Peace of mind, and the security of knowing that end of life can be met with dignity on one’s own terms, should be realities for all Americans.

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